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ABSTRACT

An examination of the various definitions of the term "development journalism" shows that in some contexts it refers to the communication process that is used to serve the development goals of the government. Usually called development support communication, such journalism uses all forms--mass media, folk media, and small group and interpersonal communication--to promote the total development plans of an authoritarian regime. In other contexts, development journalism has been used in a manner similar to that of investigative reporting. Viewed in this manner, the role of the development journalist is to examine critically the existing development programs and projects of a government, compare the planned project with its actual implementation, and report any observed shortcomings. Any discussion of development journalism is usually emotionally charged. The developing nations claim that the Western journalists are protecting their own capitalistic interests in the world when they attack development journalism as "government say-so journalism." On the other hand, Western journalists fear that the establishment of the principles of development journalism will mean an end to the freedom to collect information first-hand in foreign countries. (Author/FL)

DEVELOPMENT JOURNALISM/COMMUNICATION: THE STATUS OF THE CONCEPT

by

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The furor over the establishment of a New International Information Order has lined up the journalists of the world in two camps--the Western-style journalists who advocate a laissez-faire policy for the gathering and dissemination of information and the Second and Third World journalists who feel the need to have varying amounts of government input in the news reporting process.

Development journalism or development communication is a concept at the heart of this new information order. It appears that both the proponents and the critics of the establishment of this "new" kind of journalism are not always clear about the concept's meaning or method of application in any particular setting.

Because there is so much fear and suspicion concerning the motives involved in the use of development journalism, the discussion of the topic often disintegrates into an exchange of inflammatory rhetoric. The Second and Third World countries claim that the Western journalists are only protecting their own capitalistic interests in the news markets of the world when they attack development journalism as "government say-so journalism." On the other hand, representatives of major Western newspapers, wire services and organizations of journalists fear that the establishment of the principles of development communication will mean an end to the freedom to collect first hand information in the foreign countries of the world and that journalists will have to be content with taking a view of the world consistent with that of the authoritarian governments in power.

The purpose of this paper is to sort through the rhetoric of the

discussion of development journalism, attempt to define the concept as it is perceived and practiced in various countries, and finally to assess the place of development journalism in the context of the four theories of the press.

Background of the conflict

Since about 1970 UNESCO has provided the catalyst for the often heated discussion of the establishment of development communication. For its role, UNESCO has been attacked by the organizations which advocate press freedom in the world, e.g., IPI, IAPA, Freedom House and La Federation des Editeurs de Journaux et Publication (FIEJ). In 1976 FIEJ and IPI joined forces in making a statement which directly opposed any UNESCO move to sanction state control of information (Lent, 1977, p. 22). UNESCO-sponsored conferences held in Bogota in 1974, Quito in 1975, San Jose Costa Rica and Nairobi in 1976 each added more fuel to the fire. Even though UNESCO insisted that the papers presented at the Latin American meetings were not official UNESCO policy, the IAPA, among others, was not convinced. (Academy for Educational Development, Inc., p. 29)

Recommended at Latin American meetings of experts from Third World countries were such policies as: the idea that "national communication policies should be the exclusive concern of the State, acting as it does on behalf of the national community," a call for Latin American governments to pass laws which empowered government-controlled national news agencies to control exclusively the dissemination of "news from outside the region referring to the internal affairs of each country," the encouragement of

the nationalization of all independent print and broadcast news, and the urging of legislation permitting the arrest of correspondents whose papers or news services publish information critical of the governments involved. (Lent, 1977, p. 22)

Most of the resolutions to come out of the Latin American conferences were aimed at reducing the media dependency of the region and sought to establish policy which would improve news coverage of developing countries. (Lent, 1977, p. 22) Whatever the motives, the resolutions were perceived by Western mass media and news organizations as totally alien to their position. In 1976 IAPA passed four resolutions condemning UNESCO actions and Freedom House, the Washington Post and the London Times reported that "UNESCO was being used quietly by the Soviet Union to curb freedom of the press." (Lent, 1977, p. 24; Academy for Educational Development, Inc., p. 29) The United States threatened to withdraw or not pay its dues to UNESCO should the Soviet-sponsored draft proposal presented at the Nairobi meeting be passed. Although a compromise declaration on media-related principles was passed at the Twentieth General Conference of UNESCO in 1978 the debate has continued.

Phil Harris, University of Leicester mass communications scholar, sees the conflict this way:

> I would suggest that the two--the debate and the threat--have become so confusingly intertwined that little or no sense can now be made of the original arguments. What has happened is that Western commentators, and the Western news media in particular, have contrived to cloud the issue by erecting a smoke-screen which is designed to minimize the legitimacy of the Third World demands in the international community. This smoke-

> screen has taken the form of positing as a direct equation the desire by the Third World to nullify existing news imbalance and automatic endorsement of the abandonment of press freedom. (Harris, p. 27)

Because development communication has been defined and used in different contexts, it has been batted about with the larger press freedom vs. government control issue. Typifying the Western position, Freedom House attacked UNESCO and its stand on development journalism, claiming that the UN organization exploits the goals of development through their defense of development journalism. Specifically they stated that development journalism "presupposes--erroneously we believe--that citizens of developing nations cannot be trusted to examine competing facts or viewpoints but must hear only a single voice." ("Governmental Control of Press Advanced by UNESCO Conference," Freedom at Issue (Sept/Oct., 1976), quoted by Lent, 1977, p. 22)

In accordance with the position of Martin Wollacott of The Guardian, Phil Harris expressed the Third World's view this way:

> The Third World, as a bloc, is taken to be incapable of self-regulatory freedom, not only in the field of communications, but also in the broader functions of society. The Western argument conveniently labels all Third World countries with the same tag and extrapolates from obvious documented cases of suppression of freedom to a general indictment of the Third World as anti-democratic and unfree. (Harris, p. 28)

The Policy and Practice of Development Communication

At this point it is useful to examine the communication policies of some of the developing countries involved in this dispute to determine the philosophy and the nature of development journalism/communication in use today.

Following China's lead, intentionally or not, in the linking of the

mass media and interpersonal channels with economic development policies, leading Philippine journalists are generally credited with coining the term, development journalism/communication. Alan Chalkley, Juan Mercado, and Erskine Childers, working with the Philippine Press Institute, began as early as the mid-60's to conduct development-oriented seminars and to encourage the Philippine news service to report news about development. (Lent, 1977, p. 17; Quebral, 1975, p. 195) Later Chanchal Sarkar, director of the Press Institute in India, Amitabha Chowdhury, head of IPI's Asian program and others, recognizing the importance of the role of communication in promoting development, formed the Press Foundation of Asia in 1967. The PFA, which was funded jointly by Asian newspapers and the Ford Foundation has as its goal the promotion of development journalism. Lent says that the term was coined in 1968 following completion of the first long-term training program for economics writers. (Lent, p. 17)

The approach of this new journalism which serves the interests of countries throughout the region, is to cover news "that reflected social relevance and underlined a sense of commitment of Asian journalists to economic development in the broadest sense of the term." (Ali, p. 191) Ali, chief executive of the PFA and Editor-in-chief of DEPTHnews, an Asian feature service, claims that the credibility of the PFA is "based on professionalism, objectivity, and total independence from any government or bureaucratic control and influence. (Ali, p. 193)

From the beginning at least, development journalism was seen as a new responsibility for Asian reporters and editors. The development journalist's relationship with his government was, if anything, an ad-

versary one, where the journalist offered criticism of development plans and the exercise of such plans.

Narinder Aggarwala, the Regional Information Officer for Asia and the Pacific for the UN Development program, agrees with this approach to development journalism. In several statements Aggarwala has pointed out that development news should not be equated with government controlled news and information hand-outs; rather it should be looked upon as a new form of investigative reporting. (Aggarwala, 1978, p. 200) The journalist's job on a development newsbeat is to "critically examine, evaluate and report the relevance of a development project to national and local needs, the difference between a planned scheme and its actual implementation, and the differences between its impact on people as claimed by government officials and as it actually is." (Aggarwala, 1979, p. 181)

If the journalist takes on the job that the PFA and Aggarwala have outlined, the job will be very difficult. Far from being a mouthpiece for government propaganda, the journalist would fulfill the watchdog role of the press in the truest sense. This approach to development journalism would also require that governments be willing to support a press system which will be so openly critical.

In the exercise of development journalism many Asian writers and most governments have taken a different meaning for the concept. Sometimes called "development support communications," this form accepts the media as a tool for development. The development plan is pre-determined, usually through one or more government agencies and the job of the press is to assist in achieving some local or national, social or economic goal.

Under this system many governments have established development support communications bureaus under ministries of information and planning. (International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, Report #28, p. 11)

This is the current meaning of development journalism as it is practiced in the Philippines, India, Guyana, Indonesia, and Tanzania, among others. Because the Philippines is the birthplace of development communications it is interesting to observe how it is viewed in their total communications program.

Development communications may be said to begin in the university. The University of the Philippines at Los Banos established the Department of Development Communications in the College of Agriculture as the first of its kind in 1973.[1] (Quebral, 1975b, p. 197) Offering both undergraduate and master's degrees, the university trains persons to assist in communicating the government policies of agricultural development.

In the Philippines' context, development communication is defined by Nora Quebral, chairman of the Development Communications Department, as the "art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country and the mass of its people from poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth that makes possible greater social equality and the larger fulfillment of human potential." (Quebral, 1975a, p. 2) Or as Erskine Childers has defined it; "development support communications is a discipline in development planning and implementation in which more adequate account is taken of human behavioural factors in the design of development projects and their objectives." (Childers, 1976, p. 87)

Both Childers and Quebral stress that communication for development is not confined to the mass media channels but includes any and all effective means of communication--interpersonal face-to-face, small group, the stage play, a picture, or even a billboard. The most important feature of development communications Philippines-style is that the government is the "chief designer and administrator of the master (development) plan." (Quebral, 1975a, p. 5) Development communication in this system then is purposive, persuasive, goal-directed, audience-oriented and interventionist by nature.[2]

The Indian model is similar to that of the Philippines. Since the private sector in India is seen neither to have the means nor the inclination to promote development through the mass media, the government has taken the lead. Government leadership is defended because of the two century lag between India and the developed world. It is thought that governmental control of communications for development will provide the most efficient way to catch up.

In India as in many Latin American countries[3], the government radio and television compete with the private sector's film and newspapers. Both central and state governments "operate field publicity units for promoting national unity and social reform, agricultural improvement and family planning, in fact all development purposes." (Raghawan, p. 3)

Development support communication in India, as in the Philippines, strives to inform, educate and motivate the people to participate in the growth process. (Raghawan, p. 3)

Tanzania's Nyerere sees development support communication as pro-

viding the freedom for the people to discuss issues and decide on solutions to problems within the framework of the principles of Socialism. (Mitten, p. 36) As Rosemary Righter put it: "The underlying assumption is that development is by way of ideology, that socialism and development are coterminous." (Righter, p. 187) Information then, is used to support development goals as part of a total development package in Tanzania and in other countries with government-planned and guided communications programs.

When Leonard Sussman, director of Freedom House, refers to development support communication, he calls this government controlled form of communications "developmental journalism" as opposed to the more critical independent form (as described by Aggarwala) which Sussman labels "development journalism". Sussman says that most Third World countries share the notion that developmental journalism is a "useful concept to assure the availability of mass communications for mobilizational or integrational purposes. He draws the parallel between propaganda and the use of developmental journalism.

Whether it is called development support communications or developmental journalism, there is the distinct danger that this philosophy of communications will take the form of "government say-so" journalism and that countries which control their internal communications in this way will also be tempted to control communication flow into and out of the country. One author observes that the media in the Philippines are forbidden to criticize the president or his family, the military and the policies of government. The Philippine Council for Print Media denounced

the country's press as one of the most corrupt in the world. Amitabha Chowdhury, one of the originators of the development journalism concept said that he regrets having been involved in the coining of the term because of the attempts by governments to remould citizens in the name of development journalism. (Righter, p. 192)

Rosemary Righter goes so far as to claim that the original conceptualization and practice of development journalism by the PFA has led to its downfall:

> Its (development journalism's) successes alerted governments to the importance of economic and social reporting--and its potential usefulness, if systematically applied to mobilizing mass support behind government policies. Intended to enlarge the area of free debate, the concept has been taken over by governments, extended to cover all communications and integrated into an official variant of new journalism. (p. 189)

In spite of Chowdhury's regrets, he states that even though development journalism has often been used in authoritarian contexts, it can serve a useful purpose in the Third World without the media becoming a servant of the government. Shelton Gunaratne agrees that the media need not be subservient to government in the practice of development journalism. Although Gunaratne notes that Third World governments are often reluctant to choose between a socially responsible press which functions independently and one which is controlled by an authoritarian power, the practice of development journalism is perfectly compatible with the social responsibility theory of the press.

Calling for a "bottom up" approach to assessing the content needs of mass communications, Gunaratne's thoughts are close to those of Everett Rogers' when Rogers writes about the use of communication for self-development.

The self-development approach requires that the mass media take on specific tasks in the development process. Requests for change are made at the local level and the mass media are expected to provide "technical information about development problems and possibilities and about appropriate innovations" in response to these local needs. (Rogers, p. 233) The bottom-up approach is not necessarily inconsistent with the development support communications concept assuming individual governments formulate development plans which account for the expressed needs of the community. More likely, however, governments decide what is good for the people and establish policies without local input. For that matter, the private press in a developing country could independently take on the task of providing development support communications; the author knows of no such system, however.

Strong support for the use of development support communications is made in the final report of the Unesco International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems. Although the Commission never describes the nature of the relationship between press and government under such a system, it implies that the two will cooperate in the promotion of development programs. The report states:

> We recommend communications be no longer regarded merely as an incidental service and its development left to chance. Recognition of its potential warrents the formulation by all nations, and particularly developing countries, of comprehensive communication policies linked to overall social, cultural, economic, and political goals. (p. 4)

And later:

> We recommend that the communication component in all development projects should receive adequate financing. So-called "development support communications" are essential for mobilizing initiatives and providing information required for action

> in all fields of development--agriculture, health and family planning, education, industry and so on. (p. 7)

Whether a development support communications philosophy is adopted by a government as the Commission recommends, or the media choose to take it on themselves to write development news as Aggarwala defines it, news value must necessarily take on a new definition. Several sources refer to this change as from focusing on events of an unusual or exceptional nature to concentrating on the process of news, e.g., hunger is a process, a hunger strike is an event. (International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems; Report #11; Academy for Educational Development, Inc., pp. 18-21)

Elie Abel, in writing for the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, argues that the process approach to news is important, but this type of news falls into the soft news category. As soft news, development journalism will still need to meet the tests of timeliness, wide interest, usefulness, freshness and unusualness. Abel claims that soft news relating to development will not replace the demand for hard news by foreign correspondents and their audiences. (Abel, p. 5)

Involved in some discussions of news value is a treatment of the need for accountability on the part of the press. Tharoor, speaking at the Fletcher Forum stated that the establishment of the new information order is important to insure accountability in some form. (International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, Report #11)

The rulers of developing countries will in turn be held accountable by a "vigilent and informed public opinion" says Indian journalist Verghese. (B.G. Verghese, p. 1) The press may be accountable to the society it serves under either an independent or government controlled system but

the press can never hold the government accountable under a development support communications plan where the press is owned and operated by the government.

A Fifth Theory?

Some have described development journalism in the context of a new theory--a fifth theory of the press, maintaining that the position of developing countries is such that journalists have never experienced quite the same relationships with their societies before. In describing the four theories of the press, Siebert et al. take as their thesis "the press has always taken on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates." The question for development journalism is whether this is a new form or forms or just a variation on the traditional four theories. (p. 1)

Clearly the term development journalism/communication has at least two conceptual meanings. When it is used as development support communication, the concept refers to the communication process used only to serve the development goals of the government in power. Development journalism defined to mean the critical examination, evaluation and report of the relevance, enactment and impact of development programs, demands that the mass media be independent of government.

In the development support communication context, the authoritarian press theory is operative. Lent has summarized the rationale given for government control of development communication this way:

> Because Third World nations are newly emergent, they need time to develop their institutions. During this initial period of growth, stability and unity must be sought; criticism must be minimised and the public faith in governmental institutions and policies must be encouraged. Media must cooperate, according to this guided press concept, by stressing positive, development-inspired news, by ignoring negative societal or oppositionist characteristics and by supporting governmental ideologies and plans. (Lent, 1977, p. 18)

This philosophy is not fundamentally different from the authoritarian view that truth is a quality vested in the state and the state supercedes the individual who, in turn, is dependent on the state for achieving advanced civilization.

Development journalism when defined as evaluative and critical of government development programs, is more consistent with the social responsibility theory of the press. The Hutchins Commission argued that the "agencies of mass communication are an educational instrument; perhaps the most powerful there is; and they must assume a responsibility like that of educators in stating and clarifying the ideals toward which the community should strive." (p. 5) The Commission also pointed out that because the ownership of the press was becoming more and more concentrated in the U.S. , and thereby acquiring more power, there was a need for the press to either place control on themselves or be controlled by government. If neither of these forms of control were feasiblein a democracy the government might provide an alternative system of communications.

Aggarwala has called for this control to be placed on the media by the journalists themselves in his description of development communications. Many Latin American and Asian countries are set up for the "alternative system" as both government and private ownership exist side by side. Whatever the ownership pattern the social responsibility theory is adaptable to the press taking on the task of reporting the progress and failure

of development programs.

Accountability is mentioned by both the Hutchins Commission and the proponants of development journalism. The Commission stated that the pres "must be accountable to society for meeting the public need and for maintaining the rights of citizens and the almost forgotten rights of speakers who have no press." (p. 18) Who could be more forgotton and have less voice than the illiterate rural peoples of the developing world.

A fifth theory of the press; I think not. Depending on one's definition of this "new" concept, development journalism belongs either to the authoritarian or the social responsibility theory of the press. It is just another example of new wine in old bottles.

And what about the fear and the rhetoric? As long as governments and mass media representatives fail to reveal their actual motives in the debate, as long as neither side is willing to give a little to the needs and concerns of the opposing group, then little progress will be made in achieving a more balanced flow of information or in bringing the news of development to the deprived peoples of the world.

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Footnotes

[1] 1972 marked the beginning of martial law under Marcos in the Philippines.

[2] Shortly before the establishment of martial law, the Marcos government took control of some commercially operated newspapers and broadcasting stations. After September of 1972 the government virtually "wiped out the entire news media of the Philippines, except for the pro-Marcos Daily Express, Kanalaon Broadcasting, and a few other supporters." John Lent. "The Philippines," in Lent, ed. Broadcasting in Asia and the Pacific: A Continental Survey of Radio and Television. Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1978, p. 179.

Although broadcast outlets and newspapers have retained private ownership, the media today are subject to government control under the Department of Public Information. (See: E. San Juan, Jr. "Marcos and the Media," Index on Censorship, 7, 3 (May/June, 1978) pp. 39-47.